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THE REFLECTION OF ISRAELI SOCIETY IN POPULAR WAR-SONGS

by

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The reflection of Israeli society in popular war-songs
Lt. Col. Avi Hadida, 12-6687

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Abstract

As it was in ancient days of the People of Israel, so it is today in the modern days of the state of Israel, songs have always been one of the most prominent phenomena in the Jewish culture. A wave of songs accompanied every major national event in Israel's history. The collective national memory associates certain songs with specific wars, and some of them became anthems. Understanding the context and the meaning of the Israeli songs can be an important tool in understanding and analyzing the narratives and their evolution in Israeli society. This research shows how Israeli war songs reflect the changes that Israeli society has undergone since its establishment. .

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"...Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song..."

As it was in ancient days of the People of Israel, so it is today in the modern days of the state of Israel, songs have always been one of the most prominent cultural phenomena in the Jewish culture. Following the song of Moses after the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, the Jewish holy scriptures contain entire song and poetry books; most famous are Psalms [Tehilim], and King Solomon's Song of Songs [Shir Hashirim]. This cultural expression continues to resonate in the current days of modern Israel.

From the dawn of its existence to the present day, Israel has faced threats to its security. After decades of British colonialism ("The British Mandate"), immediately following Israel's declaration of independence on May 14th 1948, the surrounding Arab countries reacted violently; this happened simultaneously with an internal Arab uprising. The birth of Israel, in addition to other historical events such as the Holocaust and the pogroms of the nineteenth and twentieth century, made the founding generation realize that they lived under an existential threat, and in order to survive they would need to make sacrifices. This demanded unity and effort, two characteristics that the leaders highly encouraged. Indeed, through its sixty-seven years of independence, Israel has had to fight eight wars and execute countless military operations just to secure its existence. At the same time, like all Western societies, the citizens of Israel have experienced globalization, privatization, individualism and other global and internal trends that have created tension with the ethos of the "recruited society". Naturally, popular culture in general and popular songs in particular reflected these processes.

A wave of songs accompanied almost every major national event in Israel's history. The country's best writers wrote songs and the best singers sang them in the most popular festivals and media channels. The collective national memory associates certain

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songs with specific wars, and some of them became anthems. Writers and composers published these songs before, during and after the wars. Sometimes the public took a specific song, connected it to the war and gave it a new meaning, either in its original version or in an updated and reinterpreted cover version. Even the original writers sometimes modified their own songs to adapt them to the changing security reality or the peoples' requests.

Understanding the context and the meaning of the Israeli songs can be an important tool in understanding and analyzing the narratives and their evolution in Israeli society. Sometimes the songs reflect the "Official Truth" of the national narrative, and sometimes their nuances expose the gap between two competing narratives - the official one and the essential one. Analyzing their connoted meanings can highlight the interaction between the geographical imagination, the geopolitical situation and some internal social conditions. Yet, they can and sometimes do mislead the listener as has happened a few times.

This research shows how Israeli war songs reflect the changes that Israeli society has undergone since its establishment. It analyzes the songs from a variety of angles. In addition to the plain text, it will pay attention to the music and the arrangement. It will examine the song's original or the most popular singer, the first time it played, the medium in which it played and by whom. It will observe the leaders' and the common people's approach towards it; and it will search for sources that influenced the composer. It will attempt to tell the story behind the song. The paper will focus on one song from each war. The analysis of each song will start by discussing the war security context; subsequently it will approach the social processes and conclude with integrating them both to the song itself, its connoted meanings and the way it expresses the popular geopolitics theories. The final chapter of the work will discuss the "so what", the conclusions.

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"…he who is hungry will find our slice of bread…"[1]
The Struggle against the British Mandate, 1984 (1945)[2]

Shade and Well Water
Yoram Teharlev, Levi Sha'ar

In the slope above the valley,
the almond tree blossoms,
scented myrtle in the air.
That's the time before the summer,
heart opens its doors,
and arrivals are always welcome.

In such days,
all are awaiting until the night falls;
waiting for the upcoming steps;
we are not closing the bolt;
we are not closing the eyes;
on such days all are listening.

Chorus
He who is hungry will find our slice of bread.
He who is thirsty will find here shade and well water.
He whos arbor falls*,
Quietly will enter the door,
Quietly will enter, and can stay forever.

This is the house we built.
This is the pine planted.
This is the path and this is well.
Whoever comes here is our brother.
Whoever comes here will dine with us.
And the gate will never close again.

Chorus

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* A biblical connotation

As a result of the Jewish-Roman wars in the first and second century AD, the Roman Empire exiled the Jewish people from the land of Israel and changed its name from Province of Judea to the Province of Palestine. Jews scattered in the diaspora for almost two millennia. Due to ongoing persecution, Jews suffered in almost every area in they lived. In the nineteenth century, Jews started organizing in ideological movements under the overarching name of Zionism. The purpose of these movements was to find a homeland for the Jewish people. In 1917, the United Kingdom's foreign minister, Arthur James Balfour, on behalf of the British government, declared that "His Majesty's government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people…".[3] In 1922, after the First World War, the League of Nations granted the United Kingdom a Mandate over the Palestine protectorate to include a home for the Jewish people.[4] In spite of this, the British commissioners did not allow Jews to freely come and inhabit the land in their efforts to establish their national home. The Mandate authorities banned Jewish immigration to Israel and jailed immigrants and their supporters in detention camps. However, the wheels of history were irreversible at that point.

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Zionism captured Jewish hearts all over the world and ignited the geographic imagination. Jews outside Israel took enormous risks and started immigrating to Israel on land and on sea, illegally escaping their lands of origin and illegally trying to enter their destination. The Jews in Israel risked themselves as well, establishing "Ha'apala" and "Aliyah"[5] underground movements that organized the escape from the origin countries, the trip to Israel and the secret absorption of the Jews in Israel. These efforts left their unforgettable mark on a young "Kibbutz" boy in 1945, who later became the author of this song.[6]

The author of "Shade and Well Water" [Tsel u-Mei Be'er] was a young boy in Kibbutz Yagur when the bells rang, marking that another holocaust survivors' "Ma'apilim"[7] boat arrived at the shores. All the Kibbutz members went to the shore carrying clothes from the Kibbutz warehouse. They supported the exhausted new "Olim"[8], and in order to make it hard for the Mandate soldiers to recognize them, they dressed them up in these clothes and instructed them to answer any question with the words "I am a Jew from the land of Israel". This memory nested in the author's mind for almost forty years until he completed this song.

Although Teharlev published this song in 1984, in terms of text, style, images and metaphors it fits the pre-independence songs. The first reading of the song shows simple warm hospitality, and does not mention specific events. A deeper reading of the lyrics reveals the idealization of the Jewish state as the safe and eternal ("can stay forever", "gate will never close again") comforting home for all the hungry, weary and homeless Jews. The style is not very emotional, since personal fears are inappropriate in the presence of the great historic mission. The listener can only imagine how it felt to "not closing the eyes" and "listening" when the "night falls"; the song hides the emotions in the subtext. The author uses first person

plural – we – to emphasize the unity of effort. The absence of the explicit actions "Ha'apala" and "Aliyah", also symbolizes the secrecy needed in these cases ("quietly will enter the door"); no one said the explicit words.

One of the strongest motives with which the song conveys its message is contradictions. Whereas the first verse describes the external layer of a bloomy spring day, the second explains that underneath the surface, the night holds a lot of tension and action. The song keeps using the contradiction to create a geographic hierarchy of places; from a place of loneliness and alienation (the song refers to the survivor as - *he* who is… - third person singular) to the place of comradeship and solidarity (in this song, the Jews in Israel are always –*we*). From the place of starvation, thirst and weariness there is an ascending to the blossoming valleys, shaded wells and cool water.

In addition, the song's images use biblical and traditional connoted meanings to stimulate the geographic imagination and to emphasize the higher geographical hierarchy. The almond tree is the symbol of the Jewish holiday "Tu-Bishvat" and the renewal of the nature. The myrtle is one of the "Sukkot" holiday symbols (Sukkot is the holiday of building arbors – another contradiction to the crumbling arbor). The Bible frequently uses wells and bread to describe hospitality and shelter in the desert[9].

To conclude, this song reflects the public narrative of the total recruitment of the Jews of Israel to help their brothers in the diaspora who survived the prosecutions in their journey to their homeland, regardless of the personal price. It is the "raison d'etre" of the state of Israel. Whereas the falling arbor is an image of the historic destruction of the Jewish community in Israel; it is the designation of modern Israel to build a home, plant a tree and be a haven for the individuals who came from this falling arbor.

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"…a friendship like that, we are bound all our lives to remember…"
War of Independence, 1948

The friendship
Hain Guri, Alexander (Sasha) Argov

In the Negev, the autumn night falls,
and it kindles the stars in the quiet,
As the breeze rustles outside the door
And the dust settles down on the highway.

Time goes on; do we notice at all
how the months have gone by one by one?
Time goes by, there are few of us left,
and so many we once knew are gone.
Chorus
They are gone from our midst,
all their laughter, their youth and their splendor.
However, we know that a friendship like that,
we are bound all our lives to remember,
for a love that in battle is forged,
Will endure while we live, fierce and tender.

Oh, the friendship we bore without words,
it was stubborn and grey; it was wordless.
From the pain and the blood of those days,
it remains with us, ardent and yearning.

In the name of that friendship we know,
in its name we will go on, every forward,
for those friends, when they fell on their swords,
Left us this precious gift to recall them.
Chorus

On May 14, 1948, upon the termination of the British Mandate, David Ben Gurion and the Jewish People's council gathered in Tel Aviv and declared the Independence of Israel. This happened despite the threats of the Arab countries surrounding Israel and the leadership of the Israeli Arab residences to wage a war against Israel; a threat they realized only one day later. More than 6,000 Israelis lost their lives in the war of independence; this was approximately 1% of the total Jewish population of the newly declared state.

Despite the security threats and the diplomatic pressures, the leadership and the people of Israel understood that it was a historic moment for the Jewish People. For the first time in two thousand years, international geopolitics enabled the Jews to rebuild their homeland. The population of Israel included old inhabitants who had to live and struggle against the Mandate and the Arab terror, and new immigrants that kept coming to Israel. These "New-Olim" came from all over the world; many of them were refugees from Arab countries and from the holocaust. These people had almost nothing in common. They came from different cultures, different languages, different physical and economic conditions and different traditions. The only thing they shared was the understanding that this is a once in a lifetime chance, and that history would never grant another such opportunity. Globally, this post WWII period marked the end of colonialism

and the establishment of the many nation states. National patriotism was globally common in this atmosphere.

The song "The Friendship" [HaReut] was written and composed in 1948 and is the song most associated with the war of independence. "The Chizbatron", the "Palmach" band (the striking force of the "Hagana" – the underground military organization of the Jewish community, prior to the establishment of the State of Israel),[10] was the first to sing it. Haim Guri, who was a commander in the "Palmach" and a class mate of Yitzhak Rabin, wrote the song. Like many of his works (e.g. the song "Gate of Valley" [Bab-El-Wad][11] and the poem "Here lie our bodies" [Hinne Mutalot Gufoteinu]), this song emphasized the ethos of the sacrifice of the soldiers for the homeland. The song emphasizes fellowship among the soldiers as the main motivator for this sacrifice. There is no individualism what so ever in this song: like the previous song, Shade and Well water, it is in first person plural. The song does not mention names or other individual symbols, and there is only one noble common collective goal. There is no direct description of feelings, but the sub text atmosphere of the song's lyrics is dark (night, autumn, clouds); nevertheless there is a need to stay self-controlled ("stubborn, grey and wordless"). The music and the arrangement of the original recording do not reflect this grief at all, and almost contradict it. The singer sings it in a powerful way and a military march-like music accompanies him.

The song symbolizes that in spite of sadness for the loss of best friends, it is a necessity to march-on. The melody has East European influence and, together with the accordion, it demonstrates the Soviet and East European influence on Israel in general (i.e. the main party Ideology was socialist and most of the weapons for the Independence war came from East Europe) and specifically on the Israeli culture. Its 155 known recorded versions[12] and its dominance in the playlist during "Yom Hazikaron" (Israel's annual remembrance day to soldiers who have fallen in battles) show that the Israelis have adopted

this song as a symbol of the War of Independence, and in many ways as a symbol to the reality of wars and the longing for unity.

This song both reflected and reinforced the melting pot narrative, the need of the assimilation of different individuals from different origins to a single pattern of the new Israeli citizen. This narrative had to be more than just public narratives, they had to transform to performativity, to the daily behavior of each citizen.[13]

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"…this day will yet be retold, my brothers, of the nation's return to Sinai's position …"
Kadesh War (Sinai War), 1956

In Front of Mount Sinai
Yechiel Mohar, Moshe Vilenski

It's not a tale my friends
It's not a tale my friends
and it's not a passing dream:
behold here in front of Mount Sinai
behold here in front of Mount Sinai
the thorn-bush is burning.
And it is flashing in song,
in the mouths of boys regiments,
and the gates of the city
in the hand of the Samsonites*.

Chorus
Oh, flame of God,
in the eyes of the youth.
Oh, flame of God,
in the roars of engines.
This day will yet be retold, my brothers
of the nation's return to Sinai's occasion.

My friends, it's not a dream,
My friends, it's not a dream,
And it's not a dreamer's vision.
From back then until this day
from back then until this day
the thorn-bush is burning.
It is flashing in song of strength
in the hearts of God
of the boys of Zion
and the troops of Israel.

Chorus
_____
* A nickname for a military unit, biblical connotation to Samson the Hero of the hebrewmen

The Kadesh War in 1956 was a result of international geopolitics combined with Israeli-Egyptian conflicts. As a part of Nasser, the Egyptian leader's, attempts to lead the Arab world he nationalized the Suez Canal, and banned the Israeli naval approach through Tiran Straits, which were the only way to the Red Sea. It was an attack on England and France who owned the Suez Canal Company, and enjoyed its financial and geopolitical benefits. This posed severe danger to the Israeli trade routes as well. In this war, the two super-powers convinced Israel to attack Egypt, and they coordinated the global and military moves with it. Israel, which suffered from Fedayeen terror attacks from Sinai, and was dependent on these countries agreed. Israel took over the Sinai desert while Britain and France tried to take over the Suez Canal.

In order to form the Meta Narrative, this war, internationally called the Sinai War, got different names. The Egyptians called it the Tripartite Aggression War; the Israelis called it the Kadesh War. Kadesh is symbolic city from the Biblical era. The Israelites parked in Kadesh, not long after receiving the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai, on their journey from Egypt to Israel. The Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion, in letters and speeches after the war, gave holy meaning to the victories and used terms such as third Israeli

kingdom, and returning to the Mount Sinai, the place of the Torah. "We will sing again the song of Moses and the children of ancient Israel," he said, reaffirming the role of songs in the Israeli culture.[14] The attempts to glorify this war and unite the people around it led to writing this song.

This victory song was ready even before the war began. In a mysterious way, the commander of the "Nahal" military band ordered the band to go immediately to the house of Moshe Vilensky, who had just finished composing this song. Swearing to keep it a secret, they got the words, memorized them and soon afterwards, recorded the song. By the time the war was over, everyone in Israel knew this song, and the concert they played by Santa Katerina Mountain, which was identified as Mount Sinai, was ecstatic.

This story shed light on some aspects of the collectivist, recruitment oriented Israeli society of those days. Leaders who recruited the most significant writers and composers to reinforce a narrative shows both the obligation everyone felt to contribute to the unity and following the leaders, and the importance the leaders attributed to the songs. The military bands phenomenon is another aspect. Soon after Israel was established, military bands became very popular. The best writers and composers cooperated with them; they participated in the most important festivals, and their songs were constantly at the top of the radio charts.

The Music and lyrics, written in a perfect combination, aimed to create an uplifting feeling. The rhythm of the song is fast and catchy, and the accordion and drums remind the listener a military march. The lyrics are quite upfront. The song draws a clear thread of continuity from the biblical Israelites who got the Torah on Mount Sinai to the current Israelis. It tells how the never-ending fire of the thorn bush burns today in the hearts of the Israeli soldiers. It glorifies the soldiers by mentioning a specific unit among many who fought, the "Samsonites". The mentioning of this specific unit in the sentence "the gates of

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the city in the hands of the Samsonites" holds the connoted meaning of Samson, the biblical hero who collapsed the gate of the city with his bare hands.

To summarize, this is another song of the united, collectivist-minded society of Israel at eight years old; a state whose leaders and cultural elite worked together to create a narrative. Strengthening the people's beliefs and will by encouraging the religious sentiments and describing the might of its soldiers were very common. The Six Day War took it one-step forward, but songs of this war also show the first signs of an increasing sense of individualism within Israeli society.

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"…For your name scorches the lips, like the kiss of a seraph …"
The Six-Day War, 1967

Jerusalem of Gold
Naomi Shemer

The mountain air is clear as wine;
and the scent of pines
is carried on the breeze of twilight
with the sound of bells.
And in the slumber of tree and stone,
captured in her dream,
the city that sits solitary,
and in its midst is a wall.
Chorus:
Jerusalem of gold,
and of bronze, and of light
Behold I am a violin for all your songs.

How the cisterns have dried,
The market-place is empty,
and no one frequents the Temple Mount
in the Old City.
And in the caves in the mountain,
winds are howling,
and no one descends to the Dead Sea
by way of Jericho.
Chorus…
But as I come to sing to you today,
and to adorn crowns to you,
I am the smallest of the youngest of your children
and of the last poets.
For your name scorches the lips
like the kiss of a seraph/resin*,
If I forget thee, Jerusalem,**
which is all gold...
Chorus
**We have returned to the cisterns
to the market and to the market-place
A ram's horn calls out on the Temple Mount
In the Old City.
And in the caves in the mountain
thousands of suns shine -
We will once again descend to the Dead Sea
By way of Jericho!
Chorus...

* Double meaning
** Deep Jewish connotation
*** The verse was added after the war

The gradual deterioration that occurred between Israel and the Arab countries during the sixties culminated in 1967. After a series of anti-Israeli decisions and actions such as forming a military coalition against Israel, executing Palestinian terror attacks against Israel and more, Egyptian military forces crossed the Suez Canal and established combat positions in Sinai. In addition, the Egyptians deported the UN peace keeping forces from Sinai and blocked the Tiran Straits again, thus violating the cease fire agreements that ended the 1956 Kadesh War. The United States announced that despite its commitment it would not interfere militarily to open the straits. Jordan and Syria concentrated forces near the borders as well, and Iraqi units arrived at Jordan to participate in a war. A fear from an Arabic attack and intelligence information led the government to order a preemptive strike on June 5, 1967.

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Israeli society in those days got used to the idea of having an independent state, but the feeling was that this state was fragile. It had narrow borders under constant attack, and the capital city had a wall dividing it between Israel and Jordan. These fears only got stronger with the Arab siege. All those feelings got a crystal clear expression in the song Jerusalem of Gold.

The song festival was the main cultural event of every Independence Day. It took place in Jerusalem. The main radio stations broadcasted it (Israel did not have television yet) and most of the Israelis listened to it. The festival of 1967 took place on May 15, three weeks before the war. The mayor of Jerusalem asked a young songwriter, Naomi Shemer, to write a song about Jerusalem. Shemer, who was not confident she could write something for such a big event agreed eventually, and took the first step in becoming one of the most important Hebrew songwriters ever. The festival's original version of this song had only its first three verses. It caused unprecedented emotional reactions. People stood up and applauded for a long time, and as an exception of the protocol, according to the request of the mayor the anonymous young singer, Shuli Nathan, sang it again; this time with the audience accompanying her in the chorus.

The song praises Jerusalem and its beauty, which you can actually feel with your senses (clear air, sound of bells), yet it is unreachable (the wall in the midst of the city in the solitary). It describes the city and the people as a couple who have a strong bond but are doomed to separate. It describes the passionate and physically aching longing of the people for Jerusalem ("for your name scorches the lips"). It also tells how the city misses its people, and feels empty without it (the city is captured in a dream, the cisterns are dried and the market place is empty). Among the many connotations it uses, the most powerful is "If I forget you Jerusalem"; this is part of a two thousand year Jewish vow. Since the Romans destroyed the Temple and exiled them, the Jews in the diaspora for almost two thousand

years, even in their happiest hours, remembered the destruction of Jerusalem. Every couple who got married said, "If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy." The groom says it immediately breaks s glass, symbolizing the destruction of Jerusalem.

However, there was a happy ending to this song. Three weeks after the song became famous, the Six Day War opened and the IDF freed Jerusalem and the western wall. A famous scene will be forever burned in the Israeli common memory. The soldiers who freed the Western Wall, a remaining of the temple, and the holiest place for Jewish people, cried by the wall and sang "Jerusalem of Gold". The song that started as a longing song became an anthem. Naomi Shemer updated the song and added the fourth verse, describing the return of the people to Jerusalem and the happy reunion, which made "a thousand suns shine".

As much as the society adopted this song and it became a symbol of the narrative (there are 393 known versions of this song!)[15], it marks the beginning of a new period in war songs and in the Israeli society. Although in a small portion, it is the first time we meet a personal approach. Shemer, after describing the people and the holy city, talks about the feelings of the individual and uses first person single, ("*As I* come to sing…*I am* the smallest…"). It both reflected the time and legitimized the externalization of personal feelings. Another new phenomenon is the growing criticism towards the government. Whereas the holding of the West Bank and Jerusalem marked for many the return of the Jewish people to its cradle, many thought that the occupation of the Arab population could be bad for Israel. One of the expressions of this notion was the song "Jerusalem of Iron", a song that used the same structure of "Jerusalem of Gold" to counter its message. "Jerusalem of iron and of lead and of darkness" came instead "Jerusalem of gold, and of bronze and of light", and questioned whether the price Israel paid for its leaders' policy is justified.

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"…sing a song of love and not of wars …"
The War of Attrition 1969

Song of Peace
Yankal'e Rotblit, Yair Rosenblum

Let the sun rise
light up the morning.
The purest of prayers
will not bring us back.

He whose candle was snuffed out
and was buried in the dust;
bitter crying won't wake him up
and won't bring him back.

Nobody will bring us back
from a dead and darkened pit
here, neither the victory cheer
nor songs of praise will help.

Chorus
So just sing a song for peace,
don't whisper a prayer.
Just sing a song for peace
in a loud shout.

Allow the sun to penetrate
through the flowers.
Don't look back
let go of those departed.

Lift your eyes with hope,
not through the rifles' sights.
Sing a song for love
and not for wars.

Don't say the day will come
bring on that day!
Because it is not a dream.
And in all the city squares
cheer only for peace!

Chorus

Two years after the Six Days War ended, the Egyptians opened the War of Attrition. As opposed to the decisive 1967 war, Israel and Egypt attacked and counter-attacked each other for a year and a half. As the pre 1967 feeling that Israel was under siege switched to a more confident feeling and even euphoria, this kind of long war eroded the civilians and protests became more common. Whereas one part of the population, mainly religious, saw the new territories as a fulfillment of a divine promise, others opposed and claimed Israel should give them back for peace.

The geopolitical context was the US-Vietnam war, a global attrition war. This atmosphere contributed to some American cultural prominent phenomena such as the "peace and love" movements, festivals, musicals and movies (e.g. Woodstock Festival and the movie and the musical Hair). Rock music became more popular and it integrated into this trend. This cultural phenomenon spread all over the world, affected Israel as well and provided the background to the "Song of Peace".

Yankal'e Rotblit, a young reserve soldier from the "Nahal" infantry division, who was injured in Six Days War, went on a trip to Europe after the war, where he encountered the

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anti-war cultural events. This influenced him and he wrote the Song of Peace, which he gave to the "Nahal" band. The lyrics, the rock music, and even the loud protest singing style and the Hair musical choreography left no room for doubts. The Nahal military band was singing an anti-militant song.[16]

Both the speakers and the addressees in this song are plural. The speakers are soldiers who died in the wars and the addressees are the members of the Israeli society. The speakers call upon the addressees to look ahead and not look back. They urge them not to mourn (he… (who) was buried… bitter cry won't wake him up") and they criticize the dealing with wars and death as a uniting narrative ("neither the victory cheers nor songs of praise will help"). Instead of war, the society should transfer its narrative to hope ("lift your eyes with hope, not through the rifles' sights"). More than this, the people should be proactive in achieving this future ("Don't say the day will come, bring that day!"), and instead of using the city squares for parades they should use them for protest by "cheering for peace".

This song, more than anything symbolizes the transformation of the Israeli society in this period. Geopolitics moved Israel from Russian and European influence (Russia and some European countries embargoed Israel after Six Days War) to American cooperation, and culture followed. From the days of leaders who called song writers to write a victory song to leaders who boycott songs; General Ze'evi (Gandhi) and General Sharon, the commanders of the southern command (SOUTHCOM) and the central command (CENTCOM), forbad the entrance of the Nahal band and the playing of this song in their command. From songs that praise the unified effort, a unity that ignores the price the society pays, to songs that emphasize the price and self, and protest again the leaders. This song is only the first step in the crisis yet to happen to Israel, eventually resulting in the Yom Kippur war and the change of the political power in Israel.

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Ironically, twenty-six years after it first appeared, on November 4, 1995 the Song of Peace will enter the collective memory of Israel in a terrible way. In a peace-process support rally, on the city square of Tel Aviv, Yitzhak Rabin, the prime minster, who served as the Chief of Staff during Six Days War, sang this song together with the original singer. When he left the rally an assassin shot him to death. The note with the song words was found in his pocket covered with his blood.

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"…Within a small, shaded neighborhood, is a small house with a red roof …"
The Yom Kippur War, 1973

Let it be
Naomi Shemer

There is still a white sail on the horizon
opposite a heavy black cloud,
all that we ask for - let it be.
And if in the evening windows
the light of the holiday candles flickers,
all that we seek - let it be
Chorus
Let it be, let it be - Please - let it be
All that we seek - let it be.

*If the portent/messenger** is at the doorstep
put a good word in his mouth
all that we seek – let it be.
If your soul asks to
from blossom and harvest,
all that we seek – let it be.
Chorus

What is the sound that I hear
The cry of the shofar and the sound of drums
All that we ask for - let it be

If only there can be heard within all this
One prayer from my lips also
All that we seek - let it be.
Chorus

Within a small, shaded neighborhood
Is a small house with a red roof
All that we ask for, let it be
This is the end of summer, the end of the path
Allow them to return safely here
All that we seek, let it be.
Chorus

And if suddenly, rising from the darkness
Over our heads, the light of a star shines
All that we ask for, let it be

Then grant tranquility and also grant strength
To all those we love
All that we seek, may it be.
Chorus...

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* The author removed this verse from later versions of the song due to the audience request and its sadness.
** Double meaning

On Yom Kippur, October 1973, the Egyptians and the Syrians attacked Israel simultaneously. This attack caught the 1967 euphoric Israel in a surprise, and was a painful war for Israel. This war awakened the Israeli fear from annihilation again. It was so brutal that Dayan, the minister of defense, said he was afraid of the destruction Israel.

The bad news from the fights, and the multiple casualties affected the civilians. Naomi Shemer, already well known by then, wrote a song that approached those feelings. She took the music of the Beatles' song Let It Be, and wrote Hebrew lyrics. As she was teaching it to the singer Hava Alberstein, who was preparing for a concert for families of pilots who took part in the war, Naomi's husband came home. He listened to it and said that such a beautiful Israeli song should get an original Israeli score. Shemer, who planned to sing it at the same night for the first time on a television show, quickly recomposed it on her way to the television

studio, and sang it that night with its new music. Once again, and not for the last time in her career, she succeeded in expressing the Israelis feelings in a song, which became an anthem and a symbol of this war.[17] [The three versions link to Shemer's first performance, Alberstein's concert in the Air Force Base and a modern version of this song combined with the Beatles' Let It Be music].

Although it mentions the war itself, the song, via contradictions emphasizes the sorrow and the pain the families at home feel. The beginning of the song describes positive things, but expresses the fear that they are fragile and might not last. The optimistic small white sail can be overtaken by the heavy black cloud and the peaceful candle light flickers and can go off. The horn, which holds a connoted meaning of optimistic sound, mixes with the sounds of the drums of war. Although most of the time the song is a common prayer for better days the writer also prays that her individual prayer from her lips "can be heard".

The deepest effect of this song regards to the connoted meaning of one word. The word portent/messenger is someone who conveys a message. Shemer, as she often does in her songs, used a biblical word. During the war, the Israeli society loaded this word with additional meaning. The portent at the door was the military representative who came to tell the families that their son died in the war. This line, "if the portent is at the doorstep, put a good word in his mouth" was too painful for many Israelis; it touched the exposed nerves. Many people wrote letters to Naomi Shemer and asked her to remove this line. She agreed, and later versions of this song do not include it.

This song symbolizes another move of the Israeli narrative from the general to the personal, from accepting a fatal destiny to the longing for a change. Shemer does not hide the personal as a hint anymore, she writes the whole song about it. This is a song of a society which demands peaceful days, is tired of war and is not afraid to express it.

The reflection of Israeli society in popular war-songs

Lt. Col. Avi Hadida, 12-6687

"…far from the eyes, far from the heart…"

The First Lebanon War, 1982

Two Fingers from Sidon
Eli Madurski, Bennie Nagari

Two fingers from Sidon,
I sit depressed.
All day tour of guard, duties,
one looks who to shoot at.
I see a pretty girl in the village,
and I'm reminded of you.

Chorus
Far from my eyes, far from my heart,
you forgot me, and that hurts.
I think of you a lot,
a scorned soldier in Lebanon

Two fingers from Sidon
opening of co-ordinates, first thing.
A bit secure, a bit scared
in the bushes there is a roadside bomb.
A butterfly sits on a branch,
and I'm reminded of you.

Chorus

Two fingers from Sidon,
I am guarding but dying to sleep.
Hell, what are we doing,
I look in the telescope.
I see a far lit-up window,
and I'm reminded of you.

Chorus

After many years of Palestinian Katyusha rocket attacks from Lebanon into Israel, Israel waged a war on the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which had a stronghold in Lebanon. Due to an unclear military end-state, this war became very long. Many compare this war to the American war in Vietnam; it was an indecisive long war between a strong military and insurgents within the civilian environment.

The right wing Likud party was in power. This party won the election for the first time five years earlier and thus broke the hegemony of the Labor party, which had been in power for thirty years, since the establishment of Israel. Although not in power politically, many parts of the Israeli elite (i.e. artists, media members and strong organizations leaders) still identified themselves with the Labor party.

The combination of these security and political situations led to the ongoing decrease of the public support in this war. Protest rallies were common and de-legitimization of the war and the leaders expressed themselves in the popular culture. The vast majority of movies, publicities and songs from and about that period portrayed the war in a negative way. The lack of support was difficult for the military, which for the first time, found itself unpopular and out of the consensus.

The reflection of Israeli society in popular war-songs

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The song "Two Fingers from Sidon" [Shtei Etsba'ot mi-Tsidon], gives the perspective of a soldier in Lebanon. The soldier talks about the regular difficulties of war, such as missing home while being far from it and being tired. It also reminds the listener of the moral difficulties involved in anti-insurgent war – watching the girl in the village. However, the hardest thing for the soldier and the symbol of this era is the lack of domestic support. The words "Far from my eyes, far from my heart, you forgot me, and that hurts" that the soldier sends to his girlfriend are an allegory to his feelings towards the Israeli society as a whole.

Globally, the 1980's were the first years of globalization and privatization of economies. These economic trends had social implications. They shaped new forms of relationships between governments and citizens. Whereas the belief that in the long-run, free markets will eventually benefit the citizens, the social prices were immediate. Inefficient government businesses closed, subsidies decreased, unions lost their power, and societies felt that the solidarity and the mutual reliance were no longer a given. It seemed that there was no common goal anymore, and everyone should take care of himself. These effects did not pass over Israel.

This song takes the war song messages one step further. The criticism so far had come from the civilian society who aimed it toward the leaders, while embracing the military. This song shows that the military is not in the consensus anymore. The heroism, the friendship and the common goals disappeared. The soldier thinks of himself (first person single). He is demotivated, depressed and has doubts about the goals. This song also marks the end of the war songs' dominance in Israeli society. As critical as the last two songs were, at least songwriters bothered writing songs. The next wars will have few songs, if any; none of them will leave a significant mark on Israel's culture.

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The reflection of Israeli society in popular war-songs
Lt. Col. Avi Hadida, 12-6687

"…Saddam, you idiot…"
The Gulf War, 1991

Saddam, you idiot
Yossi Maimon

Mr. Saddam, Mr. Saddam,
You haven't been heard in a while.
Mr. Saddam, you are surrounded.
This is not Iran, America's here.
You Idiot, get out of there.
Boom boom boom.
Chemical weapons threatens in the war.
Chemical weapons threatens in the war.
Who do you think you are, making all this fuss?
Mr. Saddam, you Idiot, you simple man.
Get out of there.
This is not Iran, America's here.
Boom boom boom. Get out of there.
Americans are arriving, and the carrier.
Americans are arriving, and the carrier.
Looking to the left and to the right,
where are the Iraqis?
And Saddam is mentally ill,
Who wants everything by force.
Go away, step on it and go to rest.
Go to rest, you idiot.
This is not Iran, America's here.
Mr. Saddam, you Idiot, you simple man.
Get out of there.
Get out of there, America's here.
Boom boom boom. Get out of there.
Every robber always roams,
you betray your people.
Tries to negotiate with the devil,
this is not the time.
Mr. Saddam get out of there.
This is not Iran, America's here.
Boom boom boom.
How could you seceded in taking over Kuwait?
Now you think it over, how will you get of there?
Mr. Saddam, you Idiot, you simple man.
Get out of there. Boom boom boom.
Threatens with chemical weapons,
tries to frighten the world.
Who do you think you are, you simple man.
Get out of there, America's here.
Boom boom boom. Get out of there.

Although Israel did not participate actively in the first Gulf War, Iraq fired 41 Scud missiles at Israel, trying to make it react and thus disintegrate the international coalition. Israel did not react due to agreements with the Americans.

Israeli society, for the first time, suffered from direct attacks on the major population centers. Whereas in previous wars, the soldiers fought on the borders and the civilians could live their routine lives; in this war, no soldiers fought and life in the cities had to change. People hardly left their homes, trying to stay close to shelters.

Although some songs that were written before the war got new meanings and were very popular (such as Alona Dniel's "On The Roofs Of Tel Aviv"), the main war song phenomenon of this war was that there were no memorable war songs. "Saddam you Idiot" [Saddam Ya Metumtam] was the only song written directly about this war. This is a foolish humoristic song warning Saddam about America. This song for itself does not have any artistic value but it shed light on a small sub-genre, the humoristic war songs genre. There are two additional examples. The first is "Nasser is waiting for

Rabin" which Haim Heffer wrote to folk music during the pre-Six Day War waiting period. The chorus had the lines "Nasser is waiting for Rabin, ai-ai-ai…he has been waiting twice before, ai-ai-ai, and we've screwed him up ai-ai-ai-ai…". Assaf and Nadav Frishman wrote and composed the song "Yalla Ya Nasrallah" during the Second Lebanon War in 2006. The chorus says "Yalla Ya Nasrallah. We will screw you inshallah. We will return you to Allah. With all the Hezbollah…". All of these songs personify the enemies to the enemies' leaders and mock them.

As it was the case in this war, the next war, the Second Lebanon War, will hardly be expressed in songs.

The reflection of Israeli society in popular war-songs
Lt. Col. Avi Hadida, 12-6687

"…in the madness, there's no one to protect me…"
The Second Lebanon War, 2006

A Million Stars
Yiftach Krezner (Yifty)

You wanted to fly; you wanted further on.
With a half-smile, you rose above.
Million stars in the sky,
catch your color of the eye.
Give me just one more second to say good-bye.

You wanted to fly; you went too far away.
In the madness, there is no one to protect me.
Million stars in the sky
Catch your color of the eye.
I wanted one second to say good-bye.

I wanted to sing, you lifted a guitar.
An angel is playing for me now
So to you I sing.
Million stars in the sky
Catch your color of the eye.
I wanted to sing to you, to say good-bye.
I wanted one second to say good-bye.
Give me just one more second to say good-bye.

On July 2006, Hezbollah kidnapped Israeli soldiers who patrolled the border with Lebanon while shooting heavy artillery at Israel. Israel responded by heavy air and ground forces attacks on Lebanon. During this war, Hezbollah fired around four thousand rockets at the Israeli population. This mode of operation was a duplication of Saddam's strategy, and Hamas will later adopt it as its main a-symmetric strategy.

Living under rocket attacks was nothing new to Israeli society, however, the time and space extent of the fire, which lasted more than a month and reached Tel Aviv, surprised the Israelis. The ground forces' entrance to Lebanon woke up the phantom fears of the first Lebanon war; malfunctions of the military contributed to the depressed feeling as well.

The only song on this war was "A Million Stars" (in addition to the "Yalla Ya Nasrallah" gimmick). This song expresses the pain on the death of Thom Farkash, a helicopter pilot who crashed during the war. Yifty, who was a friend of Thom, arrived at Thom's house as soon as he heard about the crash. Amit Farkash, Thom's sister, asked him to write a song in the memory of Thom. She sang it at the funeral the following day. It became a hit and the song most recognized with the Second Lebanon War.[18]

This song does not speak about the war and its objectives, nor does it mention the values for which Thom sacrificed his life; it actually does not discuss Thom and the circumstances of his death at all. One cannot understand that Thom died in a war; the same

song could have been written about a car accident casualty. The subject of the song is the pain the sister feels for the loss. Her subjective pain is in the center, and she sings in first person single about herself.

This song marks the war songs' movement from where it began to the other side of the scale, in every possible aspect. From collective to personal, from ideological, either pro or con, to dealing with the self, from a military band to a civilian single singer, from march-like music to a pleasant melody, from European and Russian influence to an American one. In spite of this, Amit Farkash sang this song on the central 64th Independence Day ceremony in front of the president, the prime minister and all the senior staff of Israel. It shows that the institutionalized authority embraces this narrative and it represents a legitimate voice in the Israeli society.

So what – The conclusion

"It (Israel) has a nuclear weapon and the strongest air force in the region, but in truth, it is weaker than a spider web."[19] These were the words of Hassan Nasrallah in a speech after Israel withdrew from Lebanon in the year 2000. Nasrallah's interpretation of the cultural expressions of the Israeli society led him to the "spider web" theory. According to this theory, Israel is too sensitive to the loss of human lives, divided and hedonistic, thus it is weak like a spider web, and will not be able to sustain a long war.[20] Listening to the war songs can support this theory. This theory led him to kidnap the Israeli soldiers on the Israeli-Lebanese border, which led to the Second Lebanon War. This war was longer than Yom Kippur War and the civilians were more involved, which showed his attempts to exhaust the Israeli society. "We did not think, even one percent, that the capture would lead to a war at this time and of this magnitude. You ask me, if I had known on July 11 ... that the operation would lead to such a war, would I do it? I say no, absolutely not", Nasrallah said in an interview with Lebanon's News TV station.[21]

How could Hassan Nasrallah, a regional leader who has been famous for his understanding of the Israeli culture could have been so wrong geopolitically? Was he wrong?

Examining the Israeli society through the prism of its war songs can lead to the same conclusion as Nasrallah. There are fewer war songs, and these songs, if they exist, mainly reflect the personal pain rather than the collective goal. Other expressions of opposing wars are very easy to find on other cultural prisms such as the main television channels, newspapers and anti-war demonstrations, even during wars.

However, facts show otherwise. When there is a war, most of the population unites and supports the leaders. For example, in Operation "Protective Edge", the 2014 war in Gaza, there was a wide consensus in the Israeli society supporting the IDF and the government. Although it was the longest war since 1948 and civilians were under severe

attacks, the approval rates were around ninety percent.[22] [23] Reserve soldiers recruited almost

fully and many volunteered[24] [25]. Mayors supported and many volunteering organizations

operated, and even the opposition leader supported the prime minister[26].

The unavoidable conclusion is that war songs cannot be the only prism to society.

Israeli society today is more diverse than ever, both in its cultural streams and in its ways of

expressing them. As a vibrant democracy, a pluralism of opinions is one of its signs; there is

no hegemon elite that dictate the thoughts of the people. This is a sign of strength not

weakness. The diverse ethnicities are platforms of a variety of cultural tendencies and

musical styles. With the support of globalization and technology, culture and narratives can

be both traditional and cosmopolitan at the same time. Due to the multiplicity of media

channels, the government cannot dictate its messages like before; rather than that, it embraces

popular cultural trends.

There are additional possible explanations as well. Current leaders do not emphasize

culture enough. Whereas leaders in previous days called composers and asked them to write

a song to mark an event, in order to enforce a strategic narrative, a "Pravda", today's leaders

do not put enough significance to it. The wars themselves are less heroic, the classic image

of the family sitting home worried about the soldiers who fight other soldiers is blurred due to

the a-symmetric nature of current wars. Soldiers fight in urban environment, and the Israeli

homefront is as dangerous as the borders.[27]

And maybe, just maybe, the fact that wars do not provide new anthems anymore is the

way of the Israeli culture to signal that the Israeli society is seeking to be just another normal

society.

ENDNOTES

This paper was inspired by Yotam Regev

[1] The translation of this song and some others are based upon the "Hebrewsongs" website, which translates Hebrew songs to English. I made some modification to improve the translation and to convey message better. Other songs were translated by me. (HebrewSongs n.d.)

[2] Although this song describes events from 1945 and represents this period, it was completed in 1984. This chapter further elaborate on this point.

[3] World Zionist Organization, The Central Zionist Archives, "The Balfour Declaration, 1917",

http://www.zionistarchives.org.il/datelist/Pages/Balfour.aspx#!prettyPhoto[horizontal]/0/ (accessed 5 April 2015).

[4] The Jewish Agency, "British Mandate", http://www.jewishagency.org/israel/content/34106 (accessed 5 April 2015).

[5] The words Aliyah and Ha'apala themselves are words that contribute to the geographical imagination and create geographical hierarchy. Their meaning is ascending or climbing up, which symbolize that Israel is higher than all other places. One does not immigrate to Israel, It climbs up to get there.

[6] According to a telephone interview I condu (The Jewish Agency n.d.)cted with Yoram Teharlev, the songwriter, on March 2 2015.

[7] Ma'apilim – Jewish people who make Ha'apala, new immigrants to Israel

[8] Olim - Jewish people who make Aliyah, new immigrants to Israel

[9] For example, see Genesis 18, 1-5. "…Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three

men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet

them and bowed low to the ground. He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, [a]

do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your

feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and

then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant."

[10] The PALMACH Museum official website,

http://info.palmach.org.il/show_item.asp?itemId=8096&levelId=42798&itemType=0

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[11] Hebrewsongs, The Online Library of Hebrew songs, "Bab El Wad",

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[12] ACUM, the Israeli Association of Compositors and Musicians web site, "Hareut",

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[13] Dittmer, Jason "Narration of Nation in the Post-WWII United States". Popular Culture,

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[14] Ben Gurion Archive, "A letter to 9th Brigade", http://bg-idea.bgu.ac.il/ideaweb/21/img/12/33/0000100833001.gif (accessed April 5 2015)

[15] ACUM, the Israeli Association of Compositors and Musicians web site, "Jerusalem of

Gold",

http://www.acum.org.il/%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%93%D7%A2/%D7%AA%D7%95%D7%A6%D7%90%D7%95%D7%AA-

%D7%97%D7%99%D7%A4%D7%95%D7%A9?link=http%3A%2F%2F192.114.183.58%2FAcumSiteServices%2Fservlet%2FCServletGetWorkInfo%3FfldOutLng%3D1%26fldAcmAut%3D1%26fldWrkNbr%3D017808%26fldWrkLng%3D1&js=search4 (accessed April 5 2015).

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http://tarbut.cet.ac.il/ShowItem.aspx?ItemID=67e75694-4a0f-48dd-b847-cb3a16cee464&lang=HEB (accessed April 5 2015).

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18 Thom Farkash website http://www.thomfarkas.com/#!milionstars/ccel (accessed April 5 2015).

19 YouTube, "Nasrallah spider web speech", 26 May 2000, (published 25 March 2014 with English subtitles), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFlQWgHyNlQ (accessed April 5 2015).

20 Ynet, "Hezbollah Chief Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah", 31 July 2006,

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[25] PZM [a military section in MAKO, one of the Israel channel 2 websites], "50 Facts About Protective Edge", 27 August 2014 http://www.mako.co.il/pzm-israel-wars/operation-protective-edge/Article-5ff0c73a2b71841006.htm (accessed April 5 2015).

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